Damon and Pythias

*What would you sacrifice for a friend? Damon and Pythias were famous for their devoted friendship. One day this friendship was put to a challenging test.*

More than 2,000 years ago, two friends lived in the city of Syracuse on the island of Sicily. These young men were both lovers of truth, justice, and loyalty. In all of the city, they could find no one who held fast to these principles so well as each other. Their names were Damon and Pythias.

At that time, the king of Syracuse had complete authority. He often abused his power and made his subjects suffer under his reign. The ruler was a hot-tempered tyrant who would not stand for any hint of rebellion. He would put to death anyone who dared to speak against him.

Pythias was an excellent speaker with a voice that was both deep and strong. Crowds would often gather to hear him speak about the rights of the people. He complained about the king’s cruelty, voicing the opinion that the ruler had too much power over his subjects.

Unfortunately, not much went on in Syracuse that escaped the king’s notice. The more he heard about Pythias, the more his anger grew. Finally it exploded as he commanded his soldiers, “Bring this troublemaker before me! He will not live to see another sunset!”

The king’s men traveled to Pythias’s home, which was a far distance away. When Pythias saw the soldiers approach, he knew his situation was grave. “You must come with us,” the soldiers demanded. “The king has ordered your arrest.” Damon, who was with Pythias at the time, insisted on accompanying his friend. The group immediately started on the journey back to the king’s palace.

The two friends entered the great hall of the palace together. Damon stood a little behind as Pythias walked up to the king. The king barked, “Pythias, do you deny making speeches criticizing my rule?”

“I do not, sire,” Pythias replied in a calm, proud voice.

Pythias’s response served to anger the king even further. *He should cry and beg for his life. But he is unafraid in front of his king. I will soon have him pleading for mercy, although I will show him none.*

“Pythias,” the king said aloud, “you have dared to criticize your king. For that, the punishment is death. What do you say now?”

When Pythias heard his fate, he did not beg for his life. Instead, he replied, “I ask only that you let me go home long enough to see my family one last time and put my affairs in order.”

“How may I be certain you will return?” inquired the king suspiciously. “Do you take me for a fool?”

Damon had been listening to the conversation between the king and his friend. He could no longer remain silent. There was a stir among the bystanders as he stepped to Pythias’s side.

“Who are you?” the king demanded.

“I am Damon, my lord,” he said. “This man is my friend. I will give myself up as a pledge of his return. If he fails to come back, I will gladly die in his place.”

Amazed by this generosity, the king gave Pythias leave to depart, settling on the day and hour of his return. He was to be back in a month’s time. The king warned that he would not fail to exercise justice on Damon if Pythias did not arrive back in time.

So Pythias left for his home. Two weeks passed, then three, and still there was no sign of Pythias. The people of Syracuse concurred that Damon would surely be executed. Everyone judged Damon’s behavior to be foolish and naive.

When a month had passed, the king summoned Damon. He said mockingly, “So, Damon, where is your friend, of whom you were so sure? I fear you have allowed him to take advantage of your simple nature.”

“I am ready to die for Pythias, and I do not doubt his loyalty,” replied Damon. “I am sure that some misfortune keeps him from returning.”

At that moment, Pythias came scurrying into the great hall of the palace. He was dirty and disheveled, with numerous bruises on his face and arms. “I am here,” he gasped. “I was attacked by robbers as I was returning. They tied me up and left me for dead. It was only two days ago that I was able to free myself. They took my horse and I could not find another. So, I was forced to run all the way. Thank goodness I am in time to save you!”

Damon did not want Pythias to die. He pleaded with the king to allow his own execution to go forward. The king watched in disbelief as each friend eagerly sought to give up his life for the other. “What kind of men would gladly die for one another? They have something more valuable than all my riches,” he said to himself.

Finally, the king stopped the debate and declared, “Never in my life have I seen such devotion between friends. You may both go free. I hope you will accept my apology and allow me to share in your friendship.”

From that day forth, the king kept the two friends at his court so they could give him sound advice. With their wise counsel, he became a just and merciful ruler who gained the love and respect of his subjects.

1. Read the following sentence from the passage.

**But he is unafraid in front of his king.**

If *afraid* means “scared”, what does *unafraid* mean?

1. not scared
2. less scared
3. very scared
4. more scared

1. Read the following sentence from the passage.

**Unfortunately, not much went on in Syracuse that escaped the king’s notice.**

Which of the following words contains the same base word as *unfortunately*?

1. comfortable
2. misfortune
3. terribly
4. unfulfilled

1. Read the following sentence from the passage.

**The king watched in disbelief as each friend eagerly sought to give up his life for the**

**other.**

Which has the SAME base word as *disbelief*?

1. disable
2. leaving
3. relief
4. unbelievable

1. Read the following sentence from the passage.

**With their wise counsel, he became a just and merciful ruler who gained the love and**

**respect of his subjects.**

If *mercy* means “to forgive”, what does *merciful* mean?

1. full of forgiveness
2. needing forgiveness
3. without forgiveness
4. wanting forgiveness again

1. Read the following sentence from the passage.

**“How may I be certain you will return?” inquired the king suspiciously.**

If *suspicious* means “having doubt,” what does *suspiciously* mean?

1. full out doubt
2. lacking doubt
3. a person with doubt
4. in a way that has doubt
5. Read these sentences from the passage.

**Damon stood a little behind as Pythias walked up to the king. The king barked, “Pythias, do you deny making speeches criticizing my rule?”**

Why does the author use the work *barked* instead of “said” in the sentence above?

1. to prove the king is loud
2. to show the king is angry
3. to suggest the king has a dog
4. to imply that the king is hiding

1. Which of the following events happened AFTER Pythias arrives at the great hall?
2. Pythias is attacked and tied up by robbers.
3. The robbers steal Pythias’s horse and left him for dead.
4. Damon stays at the palace so that Pythias could return home.
5. Damon pleads with the king to execute him instead of Pythias.

1. The king allowed both men to live because
2. the men begged for mercy.
3. the men apologized for their actions.
4. he felt bad that Pythias was attacked.
5. he was impressed with their friendship.

1. Read the following sentences from the passage.

***He should cry and beg for his life. But he is unafraid in front of his king. I will soon have***

***him pleading for mercy, although I will show him none.***

Why did the author italicize the sentences above?

1. to imply the king is upset
2. to show what Pythias is planning
3. to explain what the king is thinking
4. to suggest that the words are important
5. Which word BEST describes Pythias?
6. confident
7. cruel
8. loyal
9. stubborn

Answer Key:

1. Correct Answer is A, DOK 2
2. Correct Answer is B, DOK 2
3. Correct Answer is D, DOK 2
4. Correct Answer is A, DOK 2
5. Correct Answer is D, DOK 2
6. Correct Answer is B, DOK 2
7. Correct Answer is D, DOK 1
8. Correct Answer is D, DOK 2
9. Correct Answer is C, DOK 2
10. Correct Answer is C, DOK 2